

A Literary Translation in the Making – A Process-Oriented Perspective

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Reviewed by Mădălina ADAM (IRIMIA)¹

Integrated within a broader line of investigations that address discourse processes pertaining to the practical concerns of translation (Bisiada 2021; Hatim and Mason 1990; House 2015; Mason 2009; Munday and Zhang 2017; Schäffner 2019; Trosborg 2002, etc.), *A Literary Translation in the Making – A Process-Oriented Perspective* by Claudine Borg represents a relevant contribution in terms of translation effectiveness.

The phrase *Literary Translation* leads the thought to a final product, namely a translation of a certain literary text. But whether we are investigating the methods a translator uses to render the target text (TT), their behaviour in the process, or other issues, it is certain that the task of “making” a translation can be investigated from various research angles. To provide some context for Claudine Borg’s study, I will first outline these research methods. The process and product dimensions of translation are a recurring topic in Translation Studies (TS) which raises important questions regarding the relationship between the translator’s decision-making and the final text. Donald Juppy’s article, (Juppy 2022) does address this very issue. It explains the importance of combining product- and process-based approaches in rendering the best variant of translation. These methods alone are not enough to ensure the final translation meets the target readers’ needs in terms of vocabulary, grammar, social and historical context, and so on. The author’s observations in a translation class prove that a product-based approach in translation, which focuses on the final product (i.e., the translation), without conveying a theoretical framework, is not beneficial for students, as it only

¹ Transilvania University of Braşov, madalina.irimia@unitbv.ro

focuses on error analysis with the teacher at the centre, as the decision-making factor of the entire process, thus making students self-conscious about their errors. The process-based method provides additional aspects of the translational framework, emphasizing translation methods and strategies that guide students in making specific choices in their translations. It also discusses principles and presents arguments for different translation options, thereby minimizing students' psychological stress. This process-oriented tactic has enabled scholars to identify translator behaviour from a psychological perspective. Lörscher's model on think-aloud protocols (TAP) is a breakthrough in empirical TS, allowing us to understand the psychological mechanisms behind translators' choices (Fereydouni and Karimnia 2016).

In this context, *A Literary Translation in the Making – A Process-Oriented Perspective* by Claudine Borg is must-read. It brings to the fore the Cognitive Translation Studies (CTS) perspective of the translation process, a path that paves the way for a better understanding of how a translator produces a translation from the first draft to the final publication phase. The author takes up a single case study and delves into the translation process of the experienced translator, Toni Aquilina, who translates Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt's *Monsieur Ibrahim et les Fleures du Coran* from French into Maltese. Borg follows the decision-making process from a cognitive angle, and masterfully interweaves CTS and literary translation, showcasing the immense value of meticulous analysis of the translation process. Through her observations, we gain invaluable insights into how translators approach literary texts, the cognitive processes they employ to select strategies, the evolution of the translation process from the first draft to the final version, and the crucial considerations that influence their choices. The book definitively answers several research questions, demonstrating the importance and necessity of understanding how and why certain decisions are made within the translation process that ultimately shape the TT (p. 4)

The volume is structured into seven main chapters. They provide an in-depth analysis of the case study in question and a comprehensive view on the translation process from a cognitive perspective. The introduction, list of figures, abbreviations, and appendices enhance the structural coherence and complexity. Borg starts her project by providing a theoretical background for her study. The first chapter, *Theoretical Framework: Venturing beyond classic process-oriented research*, briefly describes the specialized literature, providing context for CTS and quoting numerous studies in the field. She provides a thorough overview of the three phases of the translation process: the pre-draft, the draft, and the post-draft phases. She also offers numerous examples of researchers who have studied this process (Gerloff, Krings, Séguinot, Lörscher, Englund, Dimitrova, etc.). Notably, she

emphasizes that all research in this field has focused on short texts with more than one participant, whether experienced or novice translators. Borg's study is valuable and contributes to the knowledge in the field as she proposes a study that focuses on only one translator and a lengthy literary text. She presents the results of other researchers in the field (Tirkkonen-Condit, Pym, Krings, Englund, Dimitrova, Göpferich, etc.) and describes the translation process with various translators. The author explains how they prepare and approach a literary translation, how they make decisions during the process, how alternative translation solutions (ATSS) appear, and how professionals and novice translators deal with them. Importantly, Borg also discusses the rather marginally tackled matter of the revision of the translation process, which she considers partly dependant on the translators' experience and their relationship with the publishing house. Regarding terminological clarity and the concepts she intends to focus on, Borg chooses Mossop's two-variant distinction for "revision". Mossop coins two terms to distinguish between the two variants, namely "self-revision" and "other-revision", defined as follows: self-revision refers to the process of revising one's own work, while other-revision involves translators revising the work of their peers (p. 20).

This chapter focuses squarely on the translators' experience, which undoubtedly impacts the decision-making process along with the cognitive implications that accompany it. It also delves into the subjective choice of words and the strategies employed.

The "place" of literary translators in the industry, the challenges they face professionally and the specific context of her "subject" are tackled in the second chapter, *Context*, which creates the framework of the study.

Literary translation has a centuries-long history, yet the profession remains primarily part-time. This is because very few translators can make a living solely from this activity. Borg quotes several studies on this matter (authored by Wechsler, Fock et al., etc.) and reveals that most literary translators are employed in other related activities (p. 38). This profession has been underdeveloped due to social and economic considerations, but literary translators are becoming more vocal by establishing associations and making this occupation more visible on the market (p. 39). The author presents a short history of Malta and positions it geographically, focusing on the foreign influences that underpin the development of Maltese, "the only Semitic language written in Latin Script" (p. 41), continues by discussing the book market and literary translation in Malta (a small industry that brings no important financial income), and finishes by introducing the translator, Anthony (Toni) Aquilina, an important figure in Malta's academic context (full Professor of Translation at the University of Malta), one of the very few experienced translators who work with the French-Maltese language pair.

After contextualizing her intent, Borg moves to the methodological input of her study. Chapter three, *Methods and Data*, describes the research design and the study's objective: to gain a better understanding of how decision-making in a translational context transforms a first draft into a published product (p. 46). This chapter clearly states the methods used for data collection. These methods include verbal reports, interviews, think-aloud sessions, and observing the translator at work throughout the process, including nine drafts between 2008 and 2014 (p. 49). By employing these methods and observing the translational process in real-time, the author captures data on the decision-making translation process and the reasons behind these decisions (p. 50). Borg also details the benefits and limitations of such methods. The methodology is comprehensive. It includes classification of ATs and revisions, fieldwork employing video and audio recordings, verbalization, shadowing and interviews, and a systematic data analysis.

The methodological chapter is followed by the data analysis and findings chapter. The fourth chapter, titled *A Literary Translation in the Making* is the most important and the longest chapter in the book. It focuses on analyzing the data and presenting the results. Borg inquires about the later phases of the literary translation when it has "left" the translator's hands and reached the eyes of third parties, namely the proofreader and the publishing house. She gathers data on the translator's involvement and demands in relation to the publication phase. After presenting the translator's approach to the translation process, Borg moves on to analyze the first draft of the translation. This was her first material to generate data and form the basis for her subsequent analysis (p. 74). She then presents the findings, clearly indicating the translator's first choice of strategy. Upon completing this stage of research, the author has collected evidence of the translator's revisions on his first draft (D1). Borg has recorded an elaborate portrayal of this phase within his translation process, data generated through her well-established translation process protocols (TPPs). She presents her findings – "the main functions of this phase" – and how the translator addressed this first draft for further development of the TT (p. 81) and the creation of the subsequent drafts. The TPPs are meticulously designed to reveal the translator's translation habits, choice of words, translational style, and internal and external influences and preferences. This provides a comprehensive picture of the translator's endeavour. Borg's work is notable in that, after submitting the translation to the proofreader, she conducts a retrospective interview with the translator who reflects on his participation in a research experiment and links his views to the validation of Borg's research methods. The participant was not impinged by the researcher's presence, so the habitual working environment remained unaffected. The translation process

flowed naturally. Borg meticulously analyzed the last three drafts of the translation, which underwent minor modifications from the publisher. This demonstrates the depth and rigor of her research, as she extracted quantitative data which is indicative of the translator's refining his work until the very end (p. 119). The chapter continues with the presentation of the results, whereby Borg poses a series of questions to be discussed. The aim is to understand the translator's need to postpone translational choices by using ATs. The author pertinently derives findings and draws conclusions from the quantitative data obtained by researching these ATs in D1, shedding light on Aquilina's translation pattern. The categorization system employed comprehensively covers the translator's decision-making process, encompassing linguistic categories and translation strategies. Borg triangulates the data obtained from textual analysis with those obtained from TPPs, which provides answers to what exactly stands behind the translator's motivations when making choices in his translational process.

The investigation of the findings previously referred to is further undertaken in Chapter 5 – *From a Handwritten First Draft to the Published Version* – as the author engages in linking them with CTS and the literary translation studies literature (p. 134). She confidently incorporates Aquilina's working pattern into existing research and compares her findings with established specialized literature. This process generates interesting differences as compared to previous studies, such as the time spent on the first draft, but also similarities with them, like linearity among translators as the TT unfolds (p. 139). Borg emphasizes this point repeatedly, and with good reason: CTS studies have so far focused very little on literary translations, which makes this research valuable indeed. In this chapter, the author presents Aquilina's translation process, interlacing it with previous studies in all its phases. The translator's relationship with the publishing house is particularly noteworthy. Aquilina is a renowned translator, university professor, and recipient of numerous translation awards. Given the Maltese market size, she is certain that further research is necessary to determine whether Aquilina's position of power with the publishing house, granting him the final say in published versions, is due to his influence. It is unacceptable that other well-established translators in more important markets should not be consulted or disregarded in this aspect (p. 47).

In chapter six, *Decision-Making and Underlying Motivations*, Borg definitively explains the translational decisions that shaped the final version of the translation and the reasons behind these decisions (p. 151). The author asserts that decisions in the translation process, especially when longer texts are concerned, are made through ATs and self-revision. Aquilina's translation process, as observed through the production of ATs, provides a clear image of the translator's behaviour in the

context of CTS studies. The evidence indicates that ATs in Aquilina's case are a manifestation of his vast experience as a translator. The rich variety of variants at his disposal empowers him to make optimal decisions in the TT. This stands in stark contrast to the findings of other process studies in the field, which revealed that ATs in shorter texts are not as prevalent. Translators do not require this "cognitive aid" because they are most likely to make translational decisions spontaneously due to the concise nature of the ST. Another very interesting finding is that through these ATs, the translator feels very comfortable with the uncertainty faced when drafting D1. Well-established translators have mastered the art of navigating uncertainty in translational decisions. Their resolution to postpone such decisions until later in the process is indicative of their unwavering confidence in their expertise. As the translation process evolves and takes shape, they are certain that their decisions will prove to be the correct ones. Borg's observation on Aquilina's ATs corroborates other studies that clearly show that postponing decisions through the use of ATs is a strategic behaviour in translators. They want the full context of both the ST and the TT so they can make the most informed decisions. Borg continues to discuss her findings on the translator's self-revision process, corroborating them with other studies in the field. However, she also makes an invitation to further research in this matter. Self-revision does not seem to be linked either with the translators' experience or with the length of the translation. Rather, it informs on each translator's working profile. Some people make self-revisions when drafting, generating an almost final first draft. Others make use of it during different phases of the process. Aquilina, for example, produces self-revisions in the post-drafting phase. Borg makes a strong case for further study in this area, emphasizing the need to research ATs and self-revisions beyond the lexical approach. In her view, this approach underestimates the complexity of the translational decision-making process (p. 161). She then delves into the effects that self-revision has on the TT, testing the literal translation/deliteralization hypothesis. Studies conducted previously generated different results, but Borg challenges them. She finds that Aquilina's self-revision process actually brought the TT closer to the ST, thus literalizing it. His first draft was written rapidly, freely, and without external aid, resulting in a D1 with a larger lexical diversity. The process of self-revision brings the TT closer to the ST by eliminating this lexical variety and one of the "universals of translation", how avoidance of repetition has come to be categorised in the specialized literature. This tendency is innate and unconscious, as Aquilina's drafting of D1 with a larger lexical variety than the ST proves. However, he later "tames" the TT and shows loyalty to the ST by employing repetition. Borg's research proves that Aquilina is both ST- and TT-oriented, balancing the two throughout his translation process. Aquilina makes his choices

based on personal preferences, selecting a variant over the other. He also takes into account the plot, the characters, and the setting of the novella. Furthermore, Aquilina bases his decisions on sound and musicality in the TT and on TT readers' considerations (p. 165). Borg's results unequivocally support her assertion that translation is a highly complex and multifaceted process involving intricate cognitive processes.

Borg closes her research in *Conclusion* chapter, where she sums up her intentions and the results obtained by conducting this study. She reiterates her aims, methods, and approach. She discusses the implications of her findings and raises questions for further research. Her most significant contribution to the CTS framework is the expansion of its scope. Borg focuses on the translation process from first draft to print, while other studies in the field aim at analyzing only the course of translation or different phases of the workflow (p. 175). Borg's research offers a comprehensive view of translator behaviour, addressing crucial yet previously overlooked aspects. It highlights routines, practices, and working habits, emphasizing the pivotal role of self-revision. This extensive and literal approach significantly influences the quality of translation, and it underscores the intricacies of ATSS in the translation decision-making process. The study also reveals crucial insights into the motivations behind translational decisions and the translator's crucial role. It is evident that translators wield significant influence beyond their immediate work environment, impacting relationships with proofreaders and publishing houses. Borg's objective is clear: "that it [the study] contributes to increasing the visibility of translators' work and to achieving a better appreciation of the profession". (p. 178). The author acknowledges the limitations of the study, including its single-participant focus, the varying amounts of data collected at different stages, and the years since D1's composition that prevented self-revisions.

The detailed list of appendices that close the book represents but additional proof of the study's meticulous methodology.

Borg's contributions to TS, particularly to CTS and literary translation, are invaluable. Her methodical, long-term study of a single translator, complemented by previous research focusing on shorter texts and larger participant groups, unquestionably deepen our understanding of translator behaviour. Another key contribution to the field is the comprehensive description of the process and analysis of how a literary translation emerges from the first draft to print. This study is outstanding in its thorough navigation of the translation process. The investigation's credibility and value are further bolstered by the involvement of the translator himself. His academic background as a professor in the field of translations and his reputation as a well-established translator interlace and create

a crossover between research and practice (p. 183), enhancing the visibility of the profession and providing a number of good practices for future translators at work. This book addresses translation scholars, practitioners, and translator trainees. It provides valuable insight into the thinking and creativity processes behind literary translation, and also invites reflection and further research on the often invisible work that shapes the final text.

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